



## Somalia

### Rebuilding the State

Somalia has been plagued by instability and humanitarian crisis for decades. Since the collapse of the authoritarian Siad Barre regime in 1991, there have been numerous attempts to reunite Somalia's regions, clans, and sub-clans under a credible central authority capable of exerting territorial control and providing services and security for the Somali people. The formation of a federal government in 2012 was a turning point, but Somalia still faces considerable challenges on the path to stability.

Over the past decade, international donors have expanded their engagement and increased their focus on development aid, seeking to build resilience to drought; bolster economic growth, access to government services, and political reconciliation; expand critical infrastructure; and improve governance and the rule of law.

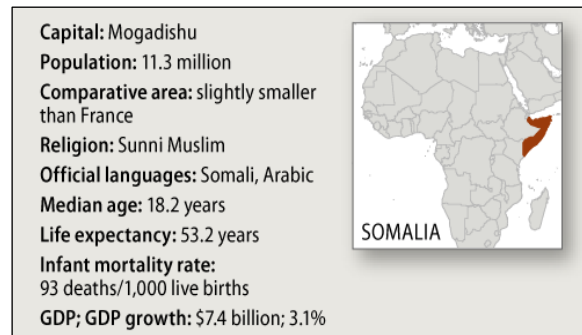
With the support of donors and an African Union (AU) stabilization force (known as AMISOM), the country has made progress: some now consider Somalia a fragile state, rather than a failed one. Political infighting, clan competition, corruption, and contradictory visions for Somalia's system of government all complicate the way forward, however, as does an enduring Islamist insurgency.

Somalia has not held direct one-person one-vote elections in decades. Foreign officials viewed the 2012 presidential election, in which parliamentarians elected the president after an internationally supported selection process and the adoption of a provisional constitution, as a credible effort to reestablish central governance.

In 2013, the United States officially recognized the Somali government for the first time in 22 years, highlighting fragile improvements, both in terms of political developments and advances against Al Shabaab, an affiliate of Al Qaeda. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) also adjusted their positions on Somalia, making the country eligible for policy advice and technical assistance. The UK was the first Western country to reopen its embassy in Somalia, followed by China, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and most East African countries. The United States reestablished a permanent diplomatic presence in the capital, Mogadishu, in late 2018.

Somalia experienced a peaceful political transition in 2017, when the parliament elected former prime minister and dual U.S.-Somali national Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, aka "Farmajo," to the presidency over the incumbent. Farmajo's government has been hamstrung by infighting, corruption, and tensions with Somalia's federal states. Competition among Arab Gulf states, which are among Somalia's largest investors and trade partners, has exacerbated frictions between the federal and state governments. These tensions may undermine U.S. policy interests in Somalia as the country moves toward elections expected in 2020/2021.

Figure 1. Somalia Facts



Source: CRS graphic. Map data from Department of State and Esri, Fact information from CIA World Factbook and IMF, 2018.

### Recent Security Developments

Challenges to stabilizing and securing the Somali state are substantial. Military offensives by AMISOM and allied Somali, Kenyan, and Ethiopian forces facilitated critical gains against Al Shabaab in 2011-2012, pushing the group out of Mogadishu and other major southern cities and ports and depriving it of valuable revenue sources. Subsequent offensives reclaimed additional towns and key bases.

Al Shabaab has proven resilient, however. It still controls parts of southern and central Somalia, earning revenue by taxing agricultural production, livestock, and illicit trades in charcoal and sugar. It has launched complex assaults on AMISOM bases that have killed hundreds of troops and prompted the mission to realign forces, pulling back from some areas that insurgents have since reoccupied.

Al Shabaab also continues to conduct attacks in Mogadishu, likely seeking to undermine confidence in the government and its security measures. In 2016, an Al Shabaab suicide bomber on a Somali airliner detonated a bomb concealed in a laptop computer; it detonated before the plane reached cruising altitude and did not destroy the aircraft. In October 2017, a truck bombing in Mogadishu (attributed to Al Shabaab, though it did not claim responsibility) killed over 500. In January 2019, Al Shabaab showed its ability to hit targets inside the heavily-guarded Mogadishu International Airport complex with mortars, striking the U.N. compound. Many diplomatic facilities and residences are located in the complex, including those of the United States.

Over a decade since AMISOM's deployment to Somalia, the timeline for its exit is uncertain. Per U.N. Security Council resolutions and a 2017 agreement between Somalia and major donors, AMISOM and Somalia's international security partners are expected to help build the Somali security sector so that the AU mission can gradually hand over responsibilities and withdraw. Various factors have stymied those efforts, including funding shortfalls, limited donor coordination, insufficient institutional development, government dysfunction, and corruption.

The Somali government has taken some notable recent steps to address corruption in the army: authorities have replaced several senior officers, launched a program to biometrically register troops to eliminate “ghost soldiers” from the payroll, and made plans to directly deposit salaries in soldiers’ accounts to ensure consistent payment and reduce theft. Reports of salary delays persist, however: in March 2019, several units outside the capital abandoned their posts, reportedly in protest, and Al Shabaab briefly claimed the areas before being repelled. In early April, elite infantry units trained, equipped, and mentored by the United States launched a new offensive to retake territory from Al Shabaab south of Mogadishu. Whether regular army units can hold the territory will be a key test.

## Nation-Building Challenges

The Somali federal government has struggled to overcome contentious clan and regional dynamics and extend its authority beyond Mogadishu. After more than 20 years without central authority, the sharing of power, revenue, and resources is subject to considerable national debate. Many clans see a decentralized system of governance as the best way to share power among clans and sub-clans, but competition over power in Mogadishu remains a flashpoint.

Federalism is enshrined in the 2012 provisional constitution, but the document is vague on how it should work. Untapped petroleum resources, among other issues, complicate revenue-sharing discussions, and the sector’s legal and regulatory gaps are a potential source of conflict. Strains between the federal and state governments worsened in 2018, and concerns about possible interference by Mogadishu in upcoming state elections may stoke tensions ahead of the anticipated 2020 polls. The federal government still seeks to define its relationship with the autonomous region of Somaliland, which declared itself independent in 1991. Clashes between Somaliland and neighboring Puntland in mid-2018 fueled fears of a more protracted conflict, which could be exploited by either Al Shabaab or a small Islamic State faction based in Puntland.

Efforts to rebuild Somalia are also complicated by pervasive corruption and spoiler networks working against the consolidation of state authority. Transparency International ranks Somalia as the most corrupt country in the world. The IMF has commended Somalia for implementing some key reforms and for taking steps to broaden its tax base, but allegations of misappropriation persist. Somalia is not eligible for significant financial support until it clears \$5 billion in debt arrears. As Somalia works towards the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative decision point, it seeks donor commitments of support for debt relief.

## Humanitarian Situation

Humanitarian conditions, exacerbated by erratic weather patterns, are poor in much of Somalia. Of the 4.2 million Somalis in need of aid in 2019, 1.5 million face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. Roughly 2.6 million are internally displaced. Some 320,000 people were displaced by conflict in 2018—the highest level of conflict-related displacement in four years. By U.N. estimates, three million children are not in school, one in seven children die before their fifth birthday, and a majority of women have undergone female genital mutilation. Funding shortfalls and

attacks against aid workers threaten relief programs, and Al Shabaab restricts humanitarian aid activities in areas it controls. Many Somalis rely on remittances from family abroad, which are estimated at over \$1 billion annually.

## U.S. Policy and Foreign Assistance

The United States seeks to promote political and economic stability, prevent Somalia from serving as a terrorist safe haven, and alleviate the country’s protracted humanitarian crisis, according to the State Department. Support for the Somali government’s state-building agenda is part of this effort. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) identifies developing security in Somalia as a key line of effort.

After recognizing the Somali government in 2013, the State Department redesignated the Somalia-focused diplomatic unit at the U.S. embassy in Kenya as the U.S. Mission to Somalia in 2015. In 2016, the United States named its first ambassador to Somalia in 25 years. Bilateral relations have been complicated by the Trump Administration’s 2017 decision to list Somalia as one of seven countries whose citizens would be barred from receiving certain types of visas to enter the United States.

The United States has provided over \$487 million in humanitarian assistance to Somalia in FY2018 - FY2019. Non-emergency U.S. foreign aid, including funding for AMISOM, totaled almost \$430 million in FY2018. The FY2020 budget request proposes cuts to governance, health, education, social service, and agriculture programs. The United States also has provided substantial support for AMISOM and Somali efforts to counter Al Shabaab, and U.S. military personnel advise, assist, and accompany regional forces during counterterrorism operations. U.S. support for AMISOM has totaled roughly \$2 billion in the past decade, and the United States has provided over half a billion dollars in security assistance for Somali forces. In late 2017, the United States suspended support for most of Somalia’s forces over corruption concerns. Assistance for the U.S.-mentored elite *Danab* units has continued.

The United States has conducted air strikes in Somalia against members of Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab for over a decade. U.S. strikes have killed key senior Al Shabaab operatives, including leader Ahmed Abdi Godane in 2014. The United States has also conducted airstrikes against a small Islamic State faction, led by a former Al Shabaab cleric in northern Somalia. The number of air strikes has been on the rise since 2015, when the Obama Administration broadened its justification for military action in Somalia; President Trump authorized expanded authority for strikes in the country in March 2017. DOD officials reported 36 strikes in 2017 (more than twice the number conducted in 2016) and 47 in 2018; almost 30 were conducted in the first quarter of 2019 alone. Amnesty International, among others, has challenged AFRICOM’s longstanding assertion that no civilian casualties have resulted from U.S. strikes in Somalia. In response, AFRICOM commenced a review and, in April 2019, acknowledged two civilian deaths in a 2018 strike.

---

**Lauren Ploch Blanchard,**

IFI0155

---

## Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.